

NETWORK SYSTEM, NETWORK DEVICE, ACCESS RESTRICTION
METHOD FOR NETWORK DEVICE, STORAGE MEDIUM, AND PROGRAM

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a network system,
network device, access restriction method for the
network device, storage medium, and program.

Related Background Art

10 Recent years have seen a rapid growth of an
Internet that is run by means of networks connected
with network devices such as computers and printers.
Consequently, various applications have been developed
that use the Internet. In the future, it is expected
15 that such Internet applications will grow rapidly. In
particular, network devices, such as printers connected
to networks, are provided with Web server capabilities
to allow a commercially available Web browser to access
the network devices and refer to the status, print
20 jobs, etc. of the network devices. The initial values
or the like of such network devices are set by device
managers. The device managers should take measures to
restrict access to Web servers in order to prevent the
settings to be overwritten by users during the
25 maintenance of the network devices.

However, although it is possible to restrict
access to a Web server and issue an error code such as

"403 Forbidden" or the like when a user who is forbidden access to the Web server tries to access it, the amount of information contained in the error code is too small to explain to the user clearly why the access to the Web server was restricted. Also, although it is possible to notify the user of the restriction on access to the Web server by changing an HTML file dynamically, the user's Web server displays the HTML file stored in its cache regardless of the HTML file's update date specified by the user. Consequently, the amount of display data cannot be reduced even if the HTML file was undated after the update date.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An object of the present invention is to make it possible to clearly explain to users the reason for restrictions on access to network devices.

Another object of the present invention is to make it possible to reliably explain to the users the reason for the latest access restriction.

Another object of the present invention is to reduce the amount of display data sent to the users.

Other objects of the present invention will be apparent from the following detailed description taken in connection with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a network system according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 shows an internal configuration of a network device in the network system of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a flowchart showing an operation of the network system according to the embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a drawing showing an example of HTTP sequence between a Web client and a Web server; and

FIGS. 5A and 5B show examples of Web browser display, where 5A shows an example of a typical Web browser and 5B shows an example of a Web browser whose access to the Web server is restricted.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Now, the network system according to an embodiment of the present invention will be described below with reference to the drawings.

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a network system according to the embodiment of the present invention;

In FIG. 1, a LAN 100 (network) is connected with a plurality of network devices including a color printer 101, an MFP (multi function peripheral) 102 such as a copier that can be used as a network printer, a monochrome printer 103, a facsimile machine 104, and scanners 105 and 106 as well as with a plurality of

computers including desktop PCs 111 and 112 and a notebook PC 113.

5 The color printer 101, MFP 102, the monochrome printer 103, the facsimile machine 104, and desktop PCs 111 and 112 are installed on the second floor of the building while the scanners 105 and 106 and notebook PC 113 are installed on the first floor of the building. The notebook PC 113, which is portable, can be disconnected from the LAN 100.

10 The desktop PCs 111 and 112 and notebook PC 113 are equipped with a Web browser to refer to the status, etc. of network devices equipped with Web server capabilities. These PCs are capable of HTTP-
15 HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) documents among the network devices.

At least one of the network devices described above is equipped with a Web server and at least one of the computers is equipped with a Web client.

20 Moreover, the network 100 is connected to the Internet 130 via a firewall 120 and further connected to another network 140 through the Internet 130.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram showing the internal configuration of the network device in the network
25 system of FIG. 1.

Referring to FIG. 2, the network device equipped with a Web server comprises a control unit 200, a

peripheral device control unit 201, and a LAN protocol control unit 202, which are connected to a control bus 203 that totally controls the control units as well as to a data bus 204.

5 The data bus 204 is connected with peripheral devices such as a printer and facsimile machine. The control unit 200 consists of a CPU, ROM, RAM, backup RAM, etc. For example, according to a program stored in the ROM, the CPU judges whether a device is placed
10 under maintenance, and decides to apply access restrictions if the device is under maintenance. The backup RAM stores a flag for the CPU to decide whether to apply access restrictions. The peripheral device control unit 201 sends and receives data to/from
15 peripheral devices such as a printer and facsimile machine via the data bus 204.

 The LAN protocol control unit 202 sends and receives data to/from other network devices or PCs via the LAN 100.

20 FIG. 3 is a flowchart showing the process of restricting access to a network device equipped with Web server capabilities, performed by the network system according to the embodiment of the present invention.

25 In FIG. 3, after a start-up of the network device equipped with Web server capabilities, if the Web client installed on a computer attempts to access the

Web server (YES in Step S300), the Web server refers to the access restriction information stored in the storage means of the network device (Step S301) and judges whether an access restriction should be applied (Step S302). The access restriction information mentioned above is set by a device manager and used to decide whether to restrict access to the Web server on the network device.

If it is judged in Step S302 that Web server access is not restricted (access is permitted) according to the access restriction information, the Web server goes to Step S303 and judges whether there is an "If-Modified-Since" request from the Web client.

The "If-Modified-Since" request here means a date/time-stamped request from the Web client. If the HTML file of the Web server has not been modified since that date, "Not Modified" is returned indicating that the HTML file has not been modified. This helps reduce the network load associated with downloading. If the Web client has cached the file that corresponds to the URL specified by the user, it sends out the "If-Modified-Since" request.

If it is judged in Step S303 that there is an "If-Modified-Since" request from the Web client, the Web server goes to Step S304, where it compares the date/time information stamped on the "If-Modified-Since" request with the date/time stamp on the HTML

file retained by the Web client to judge whether the HTML file retained by the Web server has been updated. If it is judged in Step S304 that the file has not been updated since the date/time advised by the Web client, the Web server sends "Not Modified" to the Web client, indicating that the HTML file has not been modified (Step S305). On the other hand, if the HTML file has been updated, the Web server sends, as the updated file, the HTML file (Step S306) that corresponds to FIG. 5A described later and finishes the processing.

Incidentally, in Step S306, the Web server sends the HTML file of the Top page specified by the device unless otherwise specified.

If it is judged in Step S303 that there is no "If-Modified-Since" request from the Web client, the Web server sends the HTML file (Step S306) that corresponds to FIG. 5A described later regardless of whether the HTML file has been updated, and finishes the processing.

If it is judged in Step S302 that Web server access is restricted, the Web server goes to Step S307, where it judges whether there is an "If-Modified-Since" request from the Web client. If it turns out that there is no "If-Modified-Since" request from the Web client, the Web server notifies the user of the access restriction (Step S308) by sending to the Web client the HTML file prepared in advance to display

information about the restriction on access to Web server and the reason for the restriction as shown in FIG. 5B described later. Then the Web server finishes the processing.

5 On the other hand, if it is judged in Step S307 that there is an "If-Modified-Since" request from the Web client, the Web server performs the process of Step S308 described above and finishes the processing without judging whether the HTML file has been updated since the date/time of the HTML file retained by the Web client (Step S309).

10 FIG. 4 is a drawing showing an example of HTTP sequence between a Web client and Web server. The following description will be associated with the description of FIG. 3 by appending the step numbers used in the flowchart of FIG. 3.

15 At least one of the network devices including the color printer 101, MFP (multi function peripheral) 102 such as a copier that can be used as a network printer, monochrome printer 103, facsimile machine 104 is equipped with a Web server 401. Also, at least one of the desktop PCs 111 and 112 and notebook PC 113 is equipped with a Web client 402.

20 When the Web browser on the desktop PC 111 or 112 or notebook PC 113 sends packets to a Web client 400, specifying the Web server 401 by its URL, if the Web client 400 retains the Top page information of the Web

server 401, the Web client 400 starts making an inquiry as to whether access to the Web server 401 is restricted, by using "GET/HTTP1.0 If-Modified-Since:Tuesday, 30-Feb-00..." as a data request (402) (Step S300 in FIG. 3).

Next, the Web server 401 returns "GET Ack" to inform (403) the Web client that the data has been acquired securely and returns status (404) (Step S301 in FIG. 3) in response to the data request (402). In this example, the Web server 401 first returns "HTTP/1.0 200 OK" indicating normal status, then using "<html>.<head>..._err.gif..." it returns the HTML file which shows that access to the Web server 401 is restricted (405) (Step S308 in FIG. 3). In this case, since the HTML file contains an image data file "err.gif," the Web client 400 requests the image data file "err.gif" by means of "GET/_err.gif HTTP/1.0..." (406) and in response to the request, the Web server 401 returns to the Web client 400 the HTML file (407) that corresponds to FIG. 5B described later.

FIGS. 5A and 5B show display examples of Web browsers accessing a Web server.

In FIG. 5A, the Web browser 500 displays a typical Web browser's screen 502, which contains a URL 501 that identifies a network device by specifying its IP address. In this example, the screen displays an image and status of a printer. Incidentally, the Web browser

500 displays the Top page data retained by the Web server 401 unless a file name is specified.

On the other hand, in FIG. 5B, a Web browser 503 displays the screen 505 sent by the Web server 401 when
5 access to the Web server 401 is restricted by the device manager. The image data and character data on the screen 505 makes it possible to notify the Web client 400 clearly that access to the Web server 401 is restricted.

10 Typical examples of the Web browsers 500 and 503 include Microsoft Corp.'s Internet Explorer, Netscape Communications Corp.'s Netscape Communicator, etc.

According to this embodiment, if it has been determined to restrict access to the Web server (YES in
15 Step S302), an HTML file (FIG. 5B) that contains information about the restriction on access to the Web server and the reason for the restriction is sent to the Web client (Step S308). Therefore, the HTML file sent to the Web client can notify the user reliably of
20 the restriction on access to the Web server and the reason for the restriction (e.g., maintenance). Besides, if it has been determined to restrict access to the Web server (YES in Step S302) and if the Web client has specified the update date of the data (YES
25 in Step S307), the HTML file (FIG. 5B) that contains information about the restriction on access to the Web server and the reason for the restriction is sent to

the Web client (Step S308) without comparing update dates/times of the HTML file (Step S309). This prevents the HTML file cached by the Web browser from being displayed and thus makes it possible to notify the latest reason or the like reliably. If access is not restricted, the amount of display data can be reduced because status information is provided according to the update date.

Although the above embodiment uses an HTML file to provide device information, it may also use a text file, image file, etc. Besides, although in the above embodiment, a Web server has been installed on a network device, it may also be installed on a computer and send device information to the Web client by playing the role of a proxy server.

Although a process of restricting access to the Web server has been described in relation to the above embodiment, this process may be written as a program into a storage medium and then be performed through execution of the program read out from the storage medium. Possible candidates for the storage medium include a floppy disk, hard disk, CD-ROM, MO, etc., but the storage medium is not limited to any specific type, and any type can be used as long as it can store the above-mentioned program.

As described above in detail, the present invention can clearly explain to users the reason for

